

## An Introduction to the ARRL/ARES Message Form

There are two widely used message formats in Amateur Radio; i.e., the ARRL/ARES form and the ICS-213. The following is a short introduction to the ARRL/ARES message format.

The ARRL Message Form consists of the **Header**, the **To: Field**, the **Text**, the **Signature (From:Field)**, and a **Footer**.

**Introduction:** (edited by JJ Johnston, K6APW)

The ARRL Message form consists of a  
**HEADER**,  
**TO:** Field (ADDRESSEE), the  
**TEXT BODY (MESSAGE)** combined with  
**Signature (the FROM: FIELD)**,  
**FOOTER** (for operator "bookkeeping")

All the elements of ICS-213 message form are included, but in a different format. The most frequently confusing parts of the ARRL format is found in its header, and in particular the handling instructions and word count (check). Don't worry the handling instructions and check are optional elements. Please consider the ARRL **Signature Field** to serve the same purpose as be the ICS 213 **FROM Field** as long as the position/title of the originator is included.

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### The **HEADER**

The **Number** (the originating station assigns each message that originates from their station a number). To simplify, start with #1 and start over every year in case a message has to be traced or referenced.

Next is **PRECEDENCE** (Emergency, Priority, Welfare, or Routine). In disaster operations handle only Emergency and Priority traffic unless there is a lull in traffic. Then Health and Welfare traffic can be passed after all the priority and emergency traffic is passed.

We skip the **Handling instructions (the HX field)** because it remains arcane to most, except very experienced operators. (Do not originate a message with an HX instruction unless necessary, but do relay any that are received.)

**Station of Origin** is the first radio station where the message was first originated (your callsign if you are the originator). That callsign remains unaltered with the message all the way to its destination. If you receive a message with a callsign, maintain that callsign when

relaying the message

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The next element is the **Word Count (called Check)**. The check is a primitive error checking method, we will skip that as a non-critical element when originating, but when relaying a message faithfully copy it and pass it on. The word count or check, is simply the number of words in the text, including punctuation and number groups. We do not count the words in the signature in the check. Check and see if your word count in your copied text corresponds exactly to the word count in the header. Copying only five words per line makes the word count quick and easy.

In short, when originating a message skip both the handling instructions (HX) and word count/check. Only an advanced operator should include it (training is available).

Next is the **Station Location** (city or tactical location). The state designator is not necessary unless the message is going out of state.

Then the **Time** field follows (we assume local time if the message is from and to within California). Only use UTC (ZULU time) for messages destined for out of state. If the message that you are receiving is in UTC (indicated by a “Z” or voiced as ZULU phonetically after the 24 hour number group, then relay/record that faithfully.

The **Date** is the last element of the header; e.g., May 1. The year is superfluous.

If you are a relay station. All the HEADER data remains unaltered no matter how many relays are used. An exception is unless the word count (check) is altered. The relay and delivery operator’s job is to faithfully handle the message intact. What IS most useful and essential elements in the header is the message #, **the precedence, station of origin, place, time, and date of origin**. Notice any discrepancies between the time/date that the message is originated and when it is received. This can greatly affect the relevancy of the message.

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The **TO: Field** follows. The TO field consists of the name of the person to which the message is addressed, his/her title or position, and their location. Include address, telephone number, email, or any other information only if it is necessary.

The **MESSAGE BODY** consists of the **TEXT and the SIGNATURE** separated by the word break. Commonly punctuation marks are transmitted as “X-RAY and written as an X, unless the punctuation mark is critical to the meaning of the message. For those who use the word count or check, the XRAY is counted as one word; but it is not used at the very end of the message text. Rather voice “BREAK” at the end of the text in order to maintain the integrity of conventional check methods. The word, BREAK, is not counted as a word; but signifies the end of the text.

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**FROM Field:** The **signature** follows. For beginners the transmitting station may voice “signature or signature follows”; but that is considered superfluous. Experienced operators will expect the signature to follow the word, BREAK. The signature, is never counted in the word check. It is the ARRL equivalent of the ICS message form 213, **FROM field**.

In routine and welfare messages the signature could be as simple as Jim, "Tootsie, your loving daughter Rosie, Momma, Mr. James, etc. In emergencies you need to put in the originator's full name and title/position (which is NOT the originating ham callsign and name usually but the person who composed the message). The location of the composer may also be valuable (such as a judgement call whether to include address, telephone numbers, or email addresses of the signatory. The time date stamp is not necessary if it coincides closely to the time date in the header. After the TEXT is sent, voice BREAK. This differs from the ICS message form 213 “FROM” field.

Voice, “end, no more”, or “more”, depending if no more messages or more messages are to follow.

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The **FOOTER:** The footer is not transmitted it is kept for future reference by the radio operator for bookkeeping purposes). It is to be filled in by the radio operator. It contains the callsign of the station from whom one received the message, the time and date. If the message is being relayed to another station then the footer contains both the station from which it was received and the callsign and time date of the station to which it is sent. If possible include the FCC callsign here. If the message is first being originated at that time, then simply enter “Originator” in the received box or leave it blank. If the message is being delivered note to whom time and date in the sent box. In this case try to keep a carbon copy of the message if it does not delay the delivery. Again the footer is never transmitted or received; but should be kept by the radio operator in case that the message needs to be traced (served) in the future.

When in doubt keep it simple. Message forms are a template to help remind the radio operator of important fields.

“End, No More.”